

Maine Charter School Commission

History of Charter Schools

The first enactment of charter school legislation was in Minnesota in 1991. Currently, 42 states and the District of Columbia have adopted laws allowing public charter schools. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, there were 5,997 charter schools in the 2012-2013 school year, making up 6.3 percent of all U.S. public schools. The most recent data showed 4.6 percent of public school students attended public charter schools.

What are Charter Schools?

Laws that govern public charter schools vary from state to state; however, public charter schools generally share three characteristics:

- They are public schools - free to attend, publicly funded, part of the state school system, and accountable to public bodies for their results.
- They are schools of choice, so they do not enroll students solely based on where they live.
- They are privately managed by an organization that has a charter, or contract, with an authorizer.

Public Charter schools have more autonomy than traditional public schools. They are freed from some state and local regulations, though the level of autonomy varies widely from state to state. Public Charter schools are held accountable for student performance. If the goals in the charter are not reached, the school could be closed or the charter not renewed.

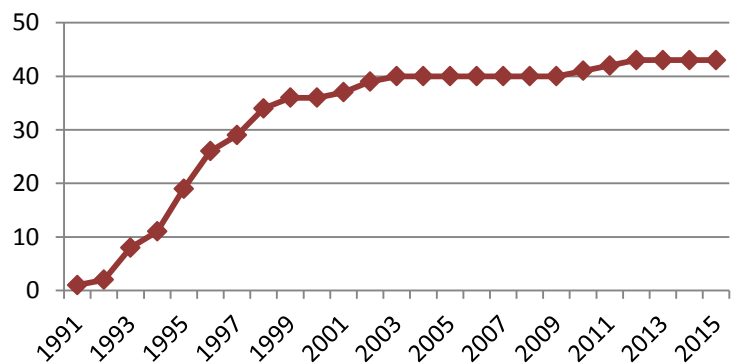
State charter school laws differ as to what organizations can authorize public charter schools. The most common are nonprofit boards.

Charter Schools in Maine

Maine's charter school law went into effect in September of 2011, making Maine the 41st state to pass public charter school legislation. In Maine, there are two types of entities permitted to authorize public charter schools. The Maine Charter School Commission can authorize up to 10 public charter schools throughout the state during the first 10 years of Maine's charter school law. Local school boards also have the ability to authorize charter schools within their school administrative units.

Maine's first charter schools opened in the 2012-13 school year, and today the following charter schools are authorized to operate in Maine: Baxter Academy for Technology and Science, Cornville Regional Charter School, Fiddlehead School of Arts and Science, Harpswell Coastal Academy, Maine Academy of Natural Sciences, Maine Connections Academy, Maine Virtual Academy, Snow Pond Arts Academy, and Acadia Academy.

Number of States with Public Charter Schools (including DC) by Year



Common Myths about Public Charter Schools

MYTH: Charter schools are private schools.

FACT: Charter schools are public schools. A charter school is a public school and is part of the state's system of public education.

Maine Public Charter Schools:

- must be nonsectarian and tuition-free;
- may not require entrance exams;
- must accept all students up to capacity

MYTH: Charter school teachers do not need to be licensed.

FACT: A public charter school must comply with applicable federal laws and regulations regarding the qualification of teachers and other instructional staff. All full-time teachers in a public charter school must either hold an appropriate teaching certificate or become certified within 3 years of the date they are hired, except for those with an advanced degree, professional certification or unique expertise or experience in the curricular area in which they teach.

MYTH: Charter schools only serve gifted students.

FACT: Public charter schools may not limit admission to pupils on the basis of intellectual ability, measures of achievement or aptitude, or athletic ability. Charter schools are open to all and may not require entrance exams.

MYTH: Charter schools are for “troubled” students.

FACT: Public charter schools are for all students. Charter schools are not alternative schools. Charter schools are very diverse in the programs they offer, in their missions, and in the populations they serve.

MYTH: Charter schools do not provide special education services.

FACT: Public charter public schools must follow the same federal and state requirements to provide special education services as other public district schools.

MYTH: Charter schools are “stealing money” from the public school system.

FACT: Charter schools are public schools; therefore, the money that follows the students who choose to attend charters remains in the public education system.

MYTH: Charter schools receive more state money than traditional public district schools.

FACT: No public charter receives more funding than a traditional school district. General education revenue must be paid to a charter school just as though it were a district. Charters may not levy property taxes, which are additional sources of revenue to district schools.

MYTH: Public Charter schools do not have to meet the same educational standards as traditional public district schools.

FACT: Public charter school programs must meet outcomes stated in the school's contract with its authorizer.

Burton M. Cross State Office Building
182 State House Station
Augusta 04333-0182
207-624-6729
mcsc@maine.gov
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